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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000656

SIPDIS

GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2015

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [LA](#) [TH](#) [DPRK](#) [LAOS](#)

SUBJECT: NORTH KOREAN ASYLUM SEEKER IN VIENTIANE

REF: A. STATE 13599

[1](#)B. VIENTIANE 106 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)C. SEOUL 355 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)D. BANGKOK 608 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT CLARKE. REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment. UNHCR/UNDP cannot issue a travel document for North Korean asylum seeker Anh, but is prepared to assist in resolving this case in terms of providing transportation within Thailand, housing, and other assistance agreed upon by concerned governments. ICRC Bangkok representative says he has discussed with his headquarters the issuance of a travel document to Anh, but ICRC cannot provide an answer yet as it has equities with North Korea, such as its office in Pyongyang, that it needs to consider. Comment. We agree with ref a approach urging the South Korean government to communicate its willingness to Thai authorities to take custody of Anh upon any arrival in Thailand. Ideally they would also be prepared to issue him a South Korean passport as -- or before -- he crosses into Thai territory (see Thai comments on this topic below). Lacking that, a firm South Korean commitment to take Anh after, if absolutely necessary, a perfunctory interview in Thailand seems to us to be essential. It appears that the South Koreans may now be willing to conduct only a security interview of Anh and not question UNHCR's determination that he wants South Korean resettlement (ref c). However, if they were to insist on interviewing Anh independently in Thailand to verify his desire to resettle to South Korea, this introduces an uncertainty which could easily unravel what will likely be carefully crafted plans to resolve this issue. Based on what we have seen so far, we cannot be certain what Anh would tell the South Koreans if they ask him about his resettlement intentions. We also cannot be certain, without the presence of a Korean-speaking USG official in such an interview, that the South Koreans might not lead Anh to say that he wants U.S. resettlement. If he states that he wants U.S. resettlement, this could leave us with a situation in which Anh is stranded in Thailand. Obtaining the South Korean commitment to take Anh will also make it easier for the Thai to accept a compromise -- land entry into Thailand -- that is not their preferred option. Post suggests that Department have US Mission Geneva weigh in with ICRC on issuance of a travel document to Anh. End summary and comment.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In response to ref a, Embassy officers on January 25 spoke with UNHCR, ICRC, and Thai government officials.

[1](#)3. (C) UNHCR Assistant Regional Representative for Protection Kirsten Young (the senior official in the office), confirmed what Vientiane-based UN official has told Embassy Vientiane. That is, neither UNHCR nor UNDP can issue travel documents in this case. Young said that UNHCR in exceptional cases does issue travel documents, but only when the person is a UNHCR-recognized refugee, which is not the situation with Anh. Young added that UNHCR typically works with the resettlement country or ICRC in cases where travel documents are needed and ICRC or the resettlement country issues the documents.

[1](#)4. (C) Young said that UNHCR/Bangkok would assist in providing protection, lodging, transportation and other necessary arrangements for Anh upon his arrival in Thailand. This assistance could begin in Bangkok or at the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge border crossing. UNHCR would plan to house Anh in Bangkok at one of its safe houses. Young said that UNHCR will do whatever it can to assist within the framework for resolving this issue that the countries concerned put in place. She said that UNHCR would, if requested, be prepared to encourage the Thai government to help in resolving this problem, but said she suspected USG intervention would carry more weight with the Thai.

[1](#)5. (C) ICRC Head of Regional Delegation Fred Grimm said, after discussion with his headquarters in Geneva, that the issuance of a laissez-passer to Anh was more complicated than he had thought. Further internal discussion will be necessary before a decision is made. ICRC has an office in Pyongyang and equities with North Korea that it must weigh. Grimm will discuss this issue further with the ICRC representative responsible for North Korea who by happenstance will be in Bangkok on January 26. Then further discussions will be necessary with Geneva. Refcoord reminded

Grimm that ICRC had issued a laissez-passer to the North Korean who entered the U.S. Consulate in Vladivostok. Refcoord also told Grimm that ICRC should not have to request any Lao agreement to ICRC involvement in this case given the Lao government position. If ICRC were to issue a laissez-passer, the logistics of that would have to be worked out since the document typically has a photograph, fingerprints, and is signed and stamped by ICRC before it is provided to the traveller.

16. (C) Late on January 24, Thai MFA Americas official Paisit Boonparlit, after emphasizing that he could not authoritatively convey decisions for the RTG in this matter, said that Ministry officials were exploring the idea floated by Embassy Bangkok (ref d) of Anh entering Thailand by land as a documented "South Korean." He shared that they had determined that past travel documents issued by the ROK to North Korean refugees did not indicate any North Korean origin. Comment: While Paisit did not say the responsible MFA officials had concluded they would accept a land crossing option if Anh had South Korean documents, that was the implication. This apparent flexibility in Thai thinking might also mean that they might consider accepting other travel documents (i.e. ICRC laissez passer) in the event that were the only alternative. End Comment.

BOYCE